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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NICOSIA 000641

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SUBJECT: TALAT PLEASED WITH SECRETARY'S REMARKS; STILL  
PESSIMISTIC ON TECHNICAL TALKS

REF: NICOSIA 503

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald Schlicher; Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

**¶11. (C) SUMMARY.** "TRNC President" Talat told Ambassador that he appreciated the Secretary's "balanced" remarks on Cyprus during her recent visit to Athens. He doubted the technical talks would start in earnest any time soon, however, and blamed the Greek Cypriots for tying down the process by insisting substantive issues also be addressed in that forum. Greek Cypriot refusal to engage in a dialogue on changes to the Annan Plan -- as well as UNFICYP Chief Moeller's apparent willingness to "go along" with Papadopoulos's "delaying" tactics -- did not bode well for the resumption of comprehensive settlement talks. Absent comprehensive talks, little progress on substance would be possible, since the Turkish Cypriots could not accept a piecemeal approach (for example a mini-deal involving Varosha). Frustrated, Talat nonetheless acknowledged the need to keep working with the UN and Moeller -- as well as the wisdom of meeting Papadopoulos in the context of the Committee on Missing Persons, even though he did not expect this meeting to accomplish much.  
END SUMMARY.

**¶12. (C)** In an April 28 meeting with Ambassador, Turkish Cypriot "President" Mehmet Ali Talat expressed appreciation for the Secretary's "balanced" and "helpful" remarks during her recent visit to Athens. He praised U.S. commitment to advancing a settlement to the Cyprus problem through the easing of Turkish Cypriot isolation -- and for U.S. support for Turkey's EU candidacy. He had not gotten an "official" readout from Turkey about how the Secretary's visit to Ankara had gone, but felt from the press and "informal" sources that it had been a success from the Turkish point of view.

**¶13. (C)** Turning to the Cyprus settlement process, Talat expressed continued frustration over what he termed Greek Cypriot "delaying tactics." The ongoing three-way discussions between his "Under Secretary" Rasit Perter, ROC Presidential Diplomatic Advisor Tasos Tzionis, and UNFICYP Chief Michael Moeller concerning the start of technical talks (reftel) were being bogged down by the Greek Cypriot insistence that the sides also address issues of substance in the technical talks forum. (Perter, who accompanied Talat in his meeting with the Ambassador, chimed in to joke that the ROC seemed to want to "solve the Cyprus problem before technical talks could begin.") Talat said he did not object to discussing substantive issues, but insisted that the Greek Cypriot side first present a clear and complete list of what changes they would seek to the existing "plan on the table" (i.e., the Annan Plan). Piecemeal discussions on individual subjects (such as Varosha) would only serve to delay an overall deal, and therefore could not take place outside the context of comprehensive settlement talks.

**¶14. (C)** Talat expressed anger at how the Greek Cypriots had abandoned their previous acceptance of the Annan Plan as a

"basis" for renewed talks. Imperfect though it may be, Talat said, the Annan Plan nonetheless represented a compromise. As such, it was a better starting point than the two sides' respective fall-back positions ("osmosis" for the Greek Cypriots, confederation or two states for the Turkish Cypriots). Greek Cypriot "demonization" of the Annan Plan, without offering a corresponding counterproposal, showed that the Papadopoulos administration was hoping negotiations would drag on indefinitely. Recent Greek Cypriot demands that negotiations be conducted with "no time limit" (a hardening of their previous concern about "asphyxiating" deadlines) only supported this interpretation of Greek Cypriot motivations, he said.

¶5. (C) At the same time, Talat was astonished and worried at the UN's apparent willingness to "play along" with the Greek Cypriot delaying game. SRSG Moeller had (perhaps inadvertently, perhaps out of bias) accepted Greek Cypriot arguments (for example, by insisting that even use of the term "Annan Plan" was a bad idea, or his reported claim that elements of the Plan "were against international law.") At the same time, Moeller appeared to be ill informed about some basic facts, Talat said -- such as when he mistakenly insisted to Pertev that the ROC had already presented a written list of desired changes to the Annan Plan. Talat hoped that his April 4 letter to SYG Annan would prompt the UN to clarify its position, and that the UN would state unequivocally that the Annan Plan remained the basis for future talks. After all, Talat reasoned, the Plan was written by the UN so the SYG should still support it.

¶6. (C) Ambassador stressed to Talat the importance of engaging with the UN and with SRSG Moeller, and underlined that personal criticism of Moeller and his approach was

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counterproductive. It was in the Turkish Cypriot interest to see the UN process move forward, first on the technical track and later -- if all parties agreed -- on substance. This must involve an honest effort by the Turkish Cypriots to improve their relationship with Moeller. Talat countered that it was Moeller's responsibility to prove he was an impartial mediator, especially since Moeller had "cooked up" the Paris Declaration, which was so disastrous for the Turkish Cypriot side. The Ambassador reminded Talat that the Greek Cypriot press had seriously inflated the importance of the Paris meeting; the Turkish Cypriots should not shape their relationship with the UN in response to spin doctors in the Greek Cypriot media. Ambassador praised Talat for publicly reiterating his willingness to find a solution that would allow the two communities to live together (most recently in a speech marking his 1-year anniversary as "president"). Staying "one step ahead" in his public rhetoric, rather than bickering with Moeller or sniping at Papadopoulos, would help demonstrate that the Turkish Cypriots were not being intransigent. Talat acknowledged this point, adding that he realized there was no alternative to working with Moeller.

¶7. (C) Talat said he was still willing to meet Papadopoulos in the context of the Committee on Missing Persons (CMP), but expressed doubt that the get-together would be worthwhile since the Greek Cypriot leader had insisted he would not talk about any subjects other than the missing. Talat worried that such a meeting could politicize the comparatively well-functioning CMP -- and allow Papadopoulos to take credit for having seen Talat without forcing the Greek Cypriot leader to talk about substantive matters. Talat had agreed to meet Papadopoulos at any time and in any context, however, and would stick to his word. Although the UN had not hammered out the details, the meeting would probably take place, Talat said, after the new Third Member arrived in June. But Talat expected little progress, either on technical committees or on a leaders' meeting, until after Greek Cypriot parliamentary elections on May 21.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: Talat seemed genuinely mystified that the Greek Cypriots could be successfully painting him as the intransigent party for refusing to discuss substance in the technical committee context -- when it is so clear (to him, at least) that blame for the lack of real progress lies squarely with Papadopoulos. He also seemed to be unaware that the shrill and defensive tone of his dialogue with the UN is playing badly, though this point was made several ways in this meeting. Neither side has broken the press blackout over the technical committee talks, however, so the Turkish Cypriots have not aired their frustrations with the process publicly -- at least not to the same degree as they have in private. The challenge (especially in light of elections in the north scheduled for June, when the ruling CTP may be tempted to pander to frustrated public opinion by slamming the UN or the Greek Cypriots) will be to encourage Talat to keep his temper in check and his eye on the ball. He must resist the temptation to respond to his frustrations by the adoption of "Denktash-style" tactics and nationalist bilge, the resort to which Papadopoulos will use against him. To do so effectively, he will also need some political space from Ankara, which appears to be in short supply. END COMMENT.

SCHLICHER